

#### WEDNESDAY FEB

24

2010

#### A DAY LIKE ANY OTHER?

WHEN: February 24<sup>th</sup>

WHERE: Delaware County, PA SCHOOL: Interboro High School

WHO: Two sophomore friends













FEMALE 16 years old



FEMALE 15 years old

### THURSDAY

#### **ONE DAY LATER.**

**February 25<sup>th</sup>** WHEN:

**Double suicide** WHAT:

WHERE: **Train tracks** NOTE:

Within days of their deaths, a Facebook memorial page

for the girls had attracted 10,000 members







2010

#### 23 DAYS LATER.

WHEN: March 17th

WHAT: **Another student suicide** 

SCHOOL: **Interboro High School** WHO: Senior-class male, 18

WHERE: **Delaware County, PA** 



**MALE** 18 years old



**APRIL** 

2

2010

16 DAYS LATER.

WHEN: April 2<sup>nd</sup>

WHAT: **Another youth suicide** 

WHERE: **Train tracks** 

WHO: Male, 18 (not in school) WHERE:

**Delaware County, PA** 



**MALE** 18 years old

## What does a community like this one do RIGHT NOW



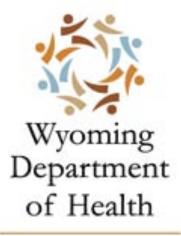
stopping more youth suicides?

#### **Youth Suicide Clusters**

What you must know to recognize and respond to a youth suicide contagion



This Well Aware™ Webinar is brought to you by the:



Commit to your health.



# Well Aware

#### **YOUTH SUICIDE CLUSTERS:**

What you must know to recognize and respond to a youth suicide contagion



#### **TODAY'S PRESENTER:**



#### MAUREEN UNDERWOOD, L.C.S.W., CGP

25-year expert in youth suicide clusters

Forged collaborations between educational systems and mental health

Consultant to CDC, SAMHSA, states and communities re how to best apply latest research to limit youth contagion

Co-developer of "LIFELINES" renowned evidence-based suicide prevention program for schools

#### With:

KEITH HOTLE, J.D., MPA Suicide Prevention Team Leader

Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Division

Wyoming Department of Health



#### YOUTH SUICIDE CLUSTERS:

What you must know to recognize and respond to a youth suicide contagion



#### **What We'll Cover Today**

- 1: ALL ABOUT CONTAGION
- **2: CLUES FROM COMMUNITIES IN CRISIS**
- 3: HOW TO RESPOND
- 4: NEXT STEPS

PART 1

**ALL ABOUT CONTAGION** 

## **Aware**

#### Youth Suicide CONTAGION: what is it?

The process by which the suicidal behavior or a suicide **influences** an **increase** in the suicidal behaviors of others.

-U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008



Multiple suicidal behaviors or suicides that **occur within a defined geographical area and fall within an accelerated time frame** may represent a potential cluster.

-Berman & Jobes, 1994

#### **Setting the Stage** *with* **STATISTICS about Youth Suicide Clusters**

#### **ADOLESCENTS**

Most at risk for suicide contagion. (Davidson, 1989)



#### **RARE**

Estimates are that about 1-5% of all youth suicides are part of a cluster, accounting for 100-200 deaths annually. (Gould et al, 1990)

#### 53

Suicide clusters identified in the United States—as 3 to 11 victims, ranging from 13-20 years of age, who took their life within a one-year period. (Gould, as cited in Joyce, 2008)

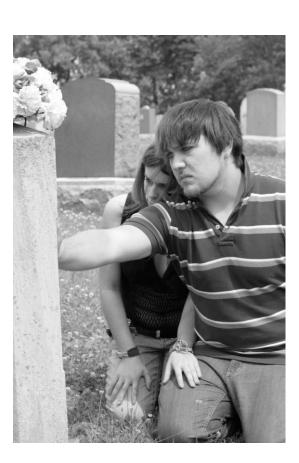
## Aware

#### Youth Suicide CONTAGION: what is it?

Phenomenon as suicide pacts in which individuals commit to die together or at about the same time.

Cluster victims share some connection, however fragile or self-perceived, but they typically have not planned their deaths together.

-Zenere, 2009



## Aware

PART 2

## CLUES FROM COMMUNITIES IN CRISIS

#### **Communities in CRISIS:**

#### RECENT CLUSTER SUICIDES across THE UNITED STATES

2009-2010: 6 dead Cornell University

2009-2010: 5 dead Palo Alto, CA

2010: dead Delaware Cnty, PA

2008-2009: 6 dead Manasquan, NJ

2008-2009: 4 dead Schnechtady, NY

2008-2009: 3 dead Laramie Cnty College, WY

## Aware

### Community in CRISIS: PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA

"These ... kids died from an untreated psychiatric illness,

or undertreated. It's not as if it's a mysterious thing and it's not as if it's not preventable. Unfortunately, there is the misconception that if someone wants to die by suicide, it's inevitable.

That's not the case.

The impulse to kill yourself waxes and wanes."

-MADELYN GOULD, Ph.D., Columbia University

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### Community in CRISIS: DELAWARE COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

- Youths likely died from untreated or undertreated psychiatric illness
- Suicide is complex but not mysterious
- Suicide is multifaceted
- Suicide is preventable
- Suicide is **not inevitable**, even among those who want to die
- The impulse to kill yourself waxes and wanes
- Intervention works

#### **CONNECTING THE DOTS**

#### What can we **LEARN** learn from communities in **CRISIS?**





**CLUES** youths leave behind may have **IMPLICATIONS** for prevention

## **Aware**



#### FEMALE 16 years old



"Bill. Life without you here is not going to be the same," the suicide victim wrote on a memorial Facebook page.
"Save a spot for me Pumpkinn."

#### Community in CRISIS:

#### **DELAWARE COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA**

Family and friends told the media that the suicide victim was heartbroken over the recent death of her boyfriend. The high-school sophomore was allegedly dating a 17-year-old senior for a year when he was struck and killed by a car while biking over to see her on Jan. 19, the suicide victim's grandmother told the media.



YOUTH SUICIDE CLUSTERS:

## **Aware**

## SUICIDE

#### **FEMALE 15 years old**



"idont wanna walk this earth if igotta do it solo, you usta be my rida. – kus iwas so high and now im so low and I dont wanna walk around on my own," she wrote at 10:30 p.m. two days before she died by suicide.

#### Community in CRISIS:

#### **DELAWARE COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA**

Another young female was saddened by the 17-year-old senior's death death in a traffic accident, and seemed to be in turmoil about the end of a recent relationship, according to her postings on Facebook.



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### **IMPLICATIONS** of these clues FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION

- **1** Cyberspace is a new "community" beyond conventional geographic limits
- Monitoring teens' interactions on the Internet may be vital to safety
- Significant loss—death of a romantic interest—can place youths at risk for self-harm
- Helping teens actively and appropriately grieve losses is critical to healing









#### **Community in CRISIS:** PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA



5 2009

17-YEAR-OLD **MALE JUNIOR** 



**TUESDAY** JUNE 2 2009

17-YEAR-OLD **FEMALE SENIOR** 



FRIDAY **AUG** 21 2009

13-YEAR-OLD **FEMALE FRESHMAN** 



MONDAY OCT 19 2009

16-YEAR-OLD **MALE JUNIOR** 



FRIDAY JAN 22 2010

19-YEAR-OLD **CLASS OF 08 MALE GRADUATE** 

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17-YEAR OLD MALE JUNIOR: DIED: May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009 during the week of school placement exams



#### **ALLEGED IN MEDIA**

- Musician and artist
- "Standing room only" memorials for this popular child drew hundreds of mourners

NOTE: If a suicide death is romanticized and seems like something special, this may start a cluster



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17-YEAR OLD FEMALE SENIOR: DIED: June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2009 during finals week Accepted into theatre program at NYU



**ALLEGED IN MEDIA** 



- i Artistic and posses a "unique style"
- i Involved in the Gay Straight
  Alliance at her high school
- Reportedly left a suicide note
- Her Facebook
  page listed
  nearly 370 friends





13-YEAR OLD FEMALE FRESHMAN DIED: August 21, 2009, just days before start of her freshman year in high school



**ALLEGED IN MEDIA** 



- Allegedly left a suicide note
- Palo Alto teacher alleges to have witnessed death, acknowledging this on Facebook memorial page
- Twitter posting claims she as a child witnessed a man stepping in front of a train at same location

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16-YEAR OLD MALE JUNIOR DIED: Oct. 19<sup>th</sup>, 2009 4<sup>th</sup> high school student in 6 months to die by suicide



#### **ALLEGED IN MEDIA**

- i Had been a member of the water polo team at Gunn since his freshman year; he reportedly quit the team a few weeks before his death
- i Killed himself in same way and spot as 17 year old male in May

NOTE: Memorializing and media coverage of this death takes a more somber tone



# Vell Aware





19-YEAR OLD MALE CLASS
OF 2008 GRADUATE DIED:
Jan. 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010 in what
would have been his
second year of college



**ALLEGED IN MEDIA** 



- i First unrecognized symptoms of illness were repetitive, looping thoughts in 10<sup>th</sup> grade
- School increasingly difficult, some relationships more strained with initial symptoms of mood disorder
- i Faced w diagnoses of bipolar disorder and then schizophrenia; acute illness affected every aspect of his life
- Escalating illness forced his return from college to home after just several months into his freshman year

### 0

### **IMPLICATIONS** of these clues FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION

- Imitative behavior is a big part of adolescence
- **(1)** Asking teens if they've ever considered suicide can ALLEVIATE distress
- Psychiatric disorders—undiagnosed, untreated, undertreated—are a major contributor to potential for suicide
- **(i)** Exposure to suicide of a friend or acquaintance can be a traumatic loss; so community must make every effort to identify vulnerable individuals
- **1** Building resiliency in teens is critical to their health and wellbeing

## | Aware

PART 3

**HOW TO RESPOND** 

#### **Role of the MEDIA**

"By showing video of the passing train, the loud train steaming down its corridor, we make that more accessible in the minds of someone else who's feeling troubled or feeling depressed."

-DAN RYAN, Palo Alto Police Department

### Aware

#### Role of the **MEDIA**

- Suicides are glorified by unethical media reporting: bold headings, front page
- This is not helpful to the current trauma of a small community
- Magnitude of risk is related to "attractiveness" of the individual whose death is being reported, and amount of publicity given
- Should avoid oversimplifying the many factors that contribute to a suicide, and give less emphasis to stressors or simplistic psychological processes, such as "pressure," since most suicide victims have long-standing mental health problems
- Should not depict the method of suicide
- Should include hotline/service agency info
- Should avoid massive or repeated doses of press coverage

### Role of the **MEDIA**: CASE IN POINT

Media coverage in and of itself does not necessarily contributed to contagion.

The suicide of musician Kurt Cobain is often cited as a positive example.

While it received significant media coverage, Cobain's wife Courtney Love

made a statement condemning his suicide immediately following his death.

This, combined with responsible reporting by the media,

is considered to have prevented a spike in suicides.

#### Role of the **MEDIA**

"We're not saying censor the news but we're asking the news media to think a little harder about what they report because by reporting it, they could be perpetuating the story."

-DAN ROMER, Ph.D., Annenberg Public Policy Center

# Vell Aware



17-YEAR OLD MALE
JUNIOR:
DIED: May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009
during the week of
school placement
exams, according to
media reports

#### Role of the **MEDIA**

Presenting suicide as the inexplicable act of an otherwise healthy and high-achieving person may encourage identification with the victim ...

Victim's uncle described his nephew as an outgoing teen who loved kids and animals, earned decent grades, played on the tennis team, and had a girlfriend.

"I don't know how we could have recognized anything," his uncle told the more than 300 adults and handfull of teens in the audience. "I'm sorry if that leaves you puzzled."

## What does a community like this one do RIGHT NOW



stopping more youth suicides?

#### **MANDATORIES** to best responding to youth suicide

FROM A POSTVENTION/CLUSTER CONTAINMENT PERSPECTIVE

- Have a crisis plan in place with suicide postvention component
- Tap national experts in youth suicide contagion containment
- Convene planning committee that involves all sectors of school & community\*
- Deliver a public response that mimics sensationalism and avoids glorification\*
- Deliver a public response that mimics sensationalism and avoids glorification\*
- Evaluate and counsel close friends of the suicide victim and those previously known to be suicidal\*

\* Suicide Clusters: Centers for Disease Control Recommendations

# ell Aware

# **COMMUNITY** response in Palo Alto

**According to media reports** 

A task force of community stakeholders was convened to prepare a response plan.

Experts from children's hospital at Stanford University are advising administrators, teachers and parents on how to recognize depression.

Counseling requests from students were up threefold as of November 1, 2009, and schools are looking into making psychological screening of students routine.

Teachers at Gunn have cancelled quizzes to show support to students, given out their home phone numbers, and held classes outdoors.

"If we could do just one thing, it would be to more effectively identify students and get more effective help."

> FRANCES WREN, mother of a 2009 Gunn graduate and director of Stanford University's Child and Adolescent Depression Clinic

# Vell Aware

### Federal FUNDING in Palo Alto





http://www.paloaltoonline.com/news/story\_print.php?story\_id=16379

Uploaded: Wednesday, April 7, 2010, 6:45 PM

Select FILE -> PRINT to print this story.



#### Palo Alto schools get grant for suicide recovery

Join schools from Alabama, New Mexico in getting funds to respond to suicides

by Chris Kenrick Palo Alto Online Staff

The federal government has awarded the Palo Alto school district \$50,000 to "respond" and "re-establish a safe learning environment" following four student suicides in the past 11 months.

Palo Alto was one of three school districts to seek and receive the grants in this round from the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools in the U.S. Department of Education. The others were the Mescalero Apache School District in Mescalero, N.M., and the Madison City School District in Madison, Ala.

The funds come from the department's Project School Emergency Response to Violence (SERV), which has awarded more than \$27.4 million to schools across the country since 2001.

"When unfortunate events disrupt the lives of children and schools, it's vital that the learning process continue. Project SERV provides districts and institutions of higher learning with resources to help respond in a timely manner," Kevin Jennings, assistant deputy secretary for the Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools, said Wednesday.

Palo Alto School Superintendent Kevin Skelly said, "Obviously a big part of our work this year has been responding to those tragedies, and we still clearly have a lot of work to do.

# Ongoing **SCHOOL** response in Palo Alto

**According to media reports** 

Student-run support group

ROCK: Reach Out. Care. Know.

# Ongoing SCHOOL response in Palo Alto

**According to media reports** 

Joyce Liu, a 17-year-old senior, created a peer-run support group that staffs a table during free periods and hosts a social networking site where classmates can find someone to listen. She also created a Web site called "Henry M. Gunn Gives Me Hope," where teachers and students share random acts of kindness and beauty that have come their way.



# Ongoing SCHOOL response in Palo Alto



#### Crisis Contact Phone Numbers:

650/424-0852 KARA 650/321-5272 Family and Children's Service 650/326-6576 Center for Living with Dying 408/980-9801 Suicide and Crisis Hotline 650/494-8420 Teenline/Crisis Intervention /Counseling 408/279-8288 Alcohol and Drug Hotline 650/573-3950

Parental Stress Hotline 408/279-8228 Parents and friends of Lesbains and Gays 408/270-8182

LGBTQ Youth Support Hotline 415/865-5555

# **Ongoing COMMUNITY** response at Cornell University

**According to media reports** 

# Community Unites to Cope With Tragedy

"Lift Your Spirits" aims to brighten C.U.'s mood

Youth **RESPONSE** in Manasquan, New Jersey

HOLDON! benefit raises over \$6,000 for youth helpline

## Other sources of PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT





U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration www.samhsa.gov





# WE'VE BEEN HOPELESS. WE'VE BEEN INSPIRED. WE'VE BEEN THERE

WE CAN US

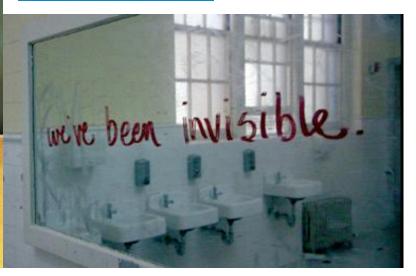
text **WeCanHelpUs** to 30364 or go to **reachout.com**HEAR FROM OTHER TEENS

that have been there & made it.

@ XSAMUSA Ad Inspire

Message and data rates may







U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration www.samhsa.gov





PART 4

**NEXT STEPS** 

## **National EXPERT CONSULTANTS**



**ONE YOUTH SUICIDE** IN ANY COMMUNITY **MAY LEAD TO** OTHERS. THAT'S WHY IT'S VITAL TO SEEK THE EXPERTISE OF FIELD LEADERS WHO UNDERSTAND YOUTH SUICIDE CLUSTERS, AND BEST PRACTICES IN POSTVENTION AND PREVENTION FOR YOUTH POPULATIONS. **HERE'S A SHORT LIST OF NATIONAL** EXPERTS.

(listed alphabetically)

SUE EASTGARD: suee@yspp.org

**MERILY KELLER: mhkeller@onr.com** 

RICHARD LIEBERMAN: rlieberm@lmu.edu

KEN NORTON: knorton@naminh.org

SCOTT POLAND: spoland@nova.edu

MAUREEN UNDERWOOD: maureenunderwood@aol.com

FRANK ZENERE: fzenere@dadeschools.net

NOTE: DR. MADELYN GOULD AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY IS A LEADING RESEARCHER IN THIS FIELD, AND HER FINDINGS ARE APPLIED IN COMMUNITIES AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS NATIONWIDE BY THESE CONSULTANTS.



# **Cluster effect**

#### [recognizing potential for youth suicide contagion]

owhere is the influence of peer behaviors on youngsters more alarming-and life-threatening -than youth suicide, and the potential for imitative deaths that can give rise to contagion.

**Well Aware Wyoming bulletin** 

> March 2010



http://www.health.wyo.gov/mhsa/prevention/suicideindex.html

**COMING NEXT from WELL AWARE:** 

# **Those Left Behind**

HELPING YOUTH SUICIDE LOSS SURVIVORS STAY SAFE FROM SUICIDE

Watch the **Well Aware website** at www.wellawaresp.org for details to come about this compelling webinar that includes: >>youth bereavement >>appropriate memorialization >>self-medicating grief with drugs or alcohol



#### **Devoted To:**

- Improving academics
- Deterring violence
- Fostering resiliency
- Enhancing coping skills
- Reducing risk
- Preventing suicide

# Well Aware

A Suicide Prevention Program for School Administrators

■ School Board Members
 ■ Superintendents
 ■ Principals
 ■ Student Services Directors
 ■ Central Office
 Administration
 ■ Deans of Students
 ■ Health Center Supervisors
 ■ Consultants
 ■ Education Policymakers

Visit us at www.wellawaresp.org
Talk to us at talkback@wellawaresp.org

#### **RESOURCES: Postvention and Containment of Youth Cluster Suicides**

#### **NEW STATE TOOLKIT**

Suicide Prevention and Postvention, from the State of Texas (2009) http://www.texassuicideprevention.org

#### 4th EDITION (2009) OF LAUDED MAINE PROGRAM

Youth Suicide Prevention, Interervention and Postvention Guidelines
http://www.maine.gov/suicide/docs/Guidelines%2010-2009--w%20discl.pdf

#### FROM THE SUICIDE PREVENTION RESOURCE CENTER

Multiple resources from the nation's only suicide technical assistance center http://www.sprc.org and enter the search term "contagion"

#### **COMMUNITY APPROACH TO POSTVENTION**

- A NATIONAL BEST PRACTICE PROGRAM: Reducing Risk and Promoting Healing For Individuals, Family and Communities After Suicide www.sprc.org/grantees/statetribe/2010/7A%201%20Norton.pdf
- Community-based suicide postvention guidelines from MHA of Wisconsin http://www.mhawisconsin.org/content/communitybasedguidelines.asp
- Community Response: Effective Action After A Suicide (from Frank Zenere) http://www.sprc.org/featured\_resources/trainingandevents/conferences/no/agenda.asp

#### FROM RESEARCHER MADELYN GOULD, Ph.D., M.P.H.

Media Contagion and Suicide Among the Young http://www.columbia.edu/itc/hs/medical/bioethics/nyspi/material/MediaContagionAndSuicide.pdf

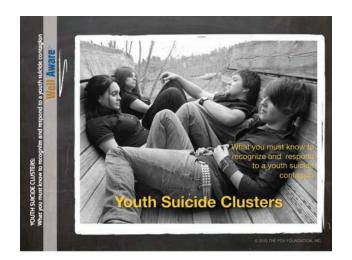
#### **OTHER FIELD LEADERS WEIGH IN**

- FRANK ZENERE: Suicide Clusters and Contagion (Sep 2009)
  http://www.naspweb.org/resources/principals/Suicide\_Clusters\_NASSP\_Sept\_%2009.pdf
- SCOTT POLAND: Preventing Cluster Suicides (Oct 2009)
  http://www.districtadministration.com/viewarticle.aspx?articleid=2159
- MAUREEN UNDERWOOD: Lifelines: A Suicide Prevention Program (Mar 2010) http://www.hazelden.org/web/go/lifelines
- RICHARD LIEBERMAN: Special Topics in School Crisis Prevention & Intervention: SUICIDE

  www.nasponline.org/prepare/cpipresentations/suicide.ppt
- SUE EASTGARD: Youth Suicide Prevention: Selecting Educational Videos http://wa-schoolcounselor.org/Files/1DayTraining\_Selecting%20Videos\_10.ppt

#### FROM THE CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

CDC Recommendations for a Community Plan for the Prevention and Containment of Suicide Clusters (1988) http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00001755.htm





#### [take note]

WELL AWARE is a program of the:



514 North 6th Street Sheboygan, Wisconsin 53081

ADVANCING COMMUNICATION IN MENTAL HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES.